

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

----- 051511

R 091105Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7225

INFO SECDEF

CIA

CINCPAC

USSAG

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

CINCUSARPAC

CINCPACAF

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0186

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, MCAP, MOPS, LA

SUBJECT: MILITARY CAPABILITIES IN LAOS

REF:

A. STATE 060000

B. VIENTIANE 8543

C. VIENTIANE 8626

D. JCS 212200Z DEC

E. VIENTIANE 8319

F. VIENTIANE 8721

SUMMARY: IN THE PERIOD THAT I HAVE SERVED IN VIENTIANE IT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT STATE 060000, WHICH DIRECTED THE MISSION TO TAKE NO ACTION TO IMPAIR THEN EXISTING U.S. OR RLG OPERATIONAL CAPABILITIES UNTIL AFTER THE FORMATION OF THE PGNU, HAS BEEN OVERCOME BY EVENTS AND SHOULD BE RESCINDED. I THEREFORE REQUEST RELIEF FROM THESE INSTRUCTIONS SO THAT I MAY ASSURE SENSIBLE MANAGEMENT OF THE MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, EASE THE TRANSITION FROM MASF TO MAP, AND BETTER UTILIZE PROJECT 404
SECRET

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PERSONNEL.

1. REDUCED CHANCES OF WAR RESUMING. ALTHOUGH PROGRESS TOWARDS A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT SET IN MOTION BY THE

FEBRUARY 21ST AGREEMENT HAS BEEN SLOW, THE CEASEFIRE HAS HELD REMARKABLY WELL AND NOW AVERAGES ONLY A FEW INCIDENTS A WEEK. WHILE NO FIRM ESTIMATE CAN BE MADE AS TO WHEN THE PGNU WILL BE FORMED, BOTH SIDES APPEAR TO BE MAKING A SINCERE AND CONSCIENTIOUS EFFORT TO MAINTAIN A POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION, AND *HE CHANCES OF RENEWED HOSTILITIES APPEAR TO US TO DIMINISH STEADILY. PSYCHOLOGICALLY, THE RLG HAS ADOPTED TO PEACETIME LIFE WITH ALACRITY, AND IS NOW COMING TO GRIPS WITH THE IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS OF FORCE REDUCTION, LIF INTEGRATION, AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR ITS LOGISTICS SUPPORT. THE COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FAR WAS ALWAYS MARGINAL AT BEST WHEN US COMBAT AIR SUPPORT WAS NOT AVAILABLE. SINCE THIS IS PRESENTLY TRUE THROUGHOUT LAOS, FAR MILITARY CAPABILITIES ARE GROSSLY INSUFFICIENT TO RESPOND TO RENEWED LARGE-SCALE WARFARE INVOLVING THE NVA. THIS HAS NOT BEEN THE RESULT OF ANY DELIBERATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT BUT RATHER AN EXPECTABLE OUTCOME OF TWO DECADES OF EXHAUSTING WAR.

2. CHANGED U.S. POSTURE. WHILE THE LAO OOOZED TOWARD A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT VARIOUS ACTIONS HAVE BEEN TAKEN WHICH GREATLY ALTERED U.S. MILITARY OPERATIONAL CAPABILITIES AND THE U.S. ROLE IN LAOS.

A. ON JULY 1, THAI SGU VOLUNTEER STRENGTH WAS REDUCED FROM 30 TO 17 BATTALIONS. BY DECEMBER 17, THIS FORCE WAS FURTHER REDUCED TO 10 BATTALIONS (REF C), AND BY JULY 1ST WILL BE TOTALLY DEMOBILIZED. HELICOPTER GUNSHIP SUPPORT FOR THESE UNITS WAS ALSO REDUCED. PERMISSION WAS GRANTED TO REDUCE PROJECT WHITEHORSE FROM 9 ARMED HELICOPTERS TO 4 BY DECEMBER 31 (REF D). PROJECT BLACKHORSE WAS REDUCED FROM 8 CH-47 HELICOPTERS TO 6 ON JULY 1 AND CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS ARE NOW UNDER WAY TO BRING THIS TO 2 OPERATIONAL AND TWO IN FLYABLE STORAGE.

B. WITH THE WITHDRAWAL OF THAI VOLUNTEERS, MISSION
SECRET

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AIR CONTRACT SUPPORT HAS BEEN PROPORTIONATELY REDUCED. MOST NON-THAI SGU MILITARY AIRLIFT SUPPORT MISSIONS WERE ASSUMED BY THE RLAF. AIR CONTACT SUPPORT FOR THE BALANCE OF FY 74 WILL BE FURTHER REDUCED; NEGOTIATIONS NOW UNDER WAY SHOULD RESULT IN A DROP IN THE NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT NEEDED TO SUPPORT MISSION PROGRAMS FROM 57 TO 32 (REF E). EXCEPT FOR CERTAIN GROUND SUPPORT ACTIVITIES, AIR AMERICA HAS VIRTUALLY PHASED OUT OF VIENTIANE; ALL VIENTIANE-BASED AIRCRAFT WERE MOVED TO UDORN BY THE END OF OCTOBER.

C. SGU TRANSFERRED ALL

MATERIAL ASSETS FROM THE
LIF TO THE FAR ON JULY 1, 1973, AND HAS REDUCED
OPERATIONAL AND LOGISTIC SUPPORT RESPONSIBILITIES.
THIS SUPPORT WILL CEASE COMPLETELY WITHIN SIXTY DAYS
AFTER THE FORMATION OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT OR 30
JULY 1974, WHICHEVER COMES EARLIER.

3. REDUCTION OF ENEMY THREAT

A. BY LATE FALL 1973, IT BECAME APPARENT THAT THE
PRC ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEFENSES ALONG THE ROADS IT WAS
BUILDING IN MR I HAD BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED (REF F).
WHILE CONSTRUCTION ON SOME ROADS CONTINUES, THE WITH-
DRAWAL OF HEAVY AIR DEFENSE WEAPONS LEADS THE MISSION
TO BELIEVE THAT THE PRC NO LONGER FEARS U.S. AERIAL
BOMBARDMENT OF THE ROAD. WE ALSO BELIEVE THIS IS A
SIGNAL TO THE U.S. AND THE RLG THAT THEY SUPPORT THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SEPTEMBER 14 PROTOCOL.

B. THE NORTH VIETNAMESE APPEAR QUITE CONTENT WITH
THE CEASEFIRE IN LAOS. IT APPEARS THAT SINCE THE
CEASEFIRE THE NORTH VIETNAMESE HAVE WITHDRAWN AS MANY
AS THREE COMBAT REGIMENTS FROM THE SOUTHERN PANHANDLE
AND THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE THAT A REDUCTION IN THE
NUMBER OF SUPPORT/COMBAT SUPPORT PERSONNEL HAS ALSO
TAKEN PLACE. IN NORTH LAOS THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT
ELEMENTS OF THE 316TH DIVISION HAVE WITHDRAWN TO NORTH
VIETNAM. NVA UNITS HAVE NOT ENGAGED IN ANY SIGNIFICANT
SECRET

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COMBAT ACTIVITY WITHIN LAOS SINCE APRIL 1973 AND THERE
ARE NO INDICATIONS OF PREPARATIONS FOR ANY OFFENSIVE
ACTIVITY IN LAOS THIS DRY SEASON.

4. NEED TO EASE TRANSITION FROM MASF TO MAP. IF WE
ARE REQUIRED TO CONTINUE REQUISITIONING FOR A "FULL
OPERATIONAL CAPABILITY" DURING THE REMAINDER OF FY 74,
WE BELIEVE THAT THE LAO COULD GO TO BED ON JUNE 30
DREAMING OF THE EARLY 1970'S AND AWAKEN ON JULY 1 TO
THE REALITY OF FY 75. I AM CONFIDENT THAT THE FOREIGN
ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1973, WHICH TRANSFERS LAOS MILITARY
ASSISTANCE FROM MASF TO MAP, WILL PROVIDE SUFFICIENT
SUPPORT, BUT IT IS CLEAR THAT THE LAO ARMED FORCES WILL
HAVE TO GET USED TO A MORE AUSTERE REGIME. WE SHOULD
BE GIVEN SUFFICIENT FLEXIBILITY IN THE LOGISTICS FIELD
DURING THE BALANCE OF FY 74 TO EASE THE TRANSITION OF
THE LAO FROM "FULL OPERATIONAL CAPABILITY" ON MASF TO
THE MORE LEAN DIET OF MAP. WE MUST BE ALLOWED TO RE-
DUCE OUR LOGISTICAL REQUIREMENTS WITHOUT REFERRING
EVERY PROPOSED ACTION TO WASHINGTON FOR APPROVAL.
FOR EXAMPLE, UNDER CURRENT INSTRUCTIONS WE ARE
REQUISITIONING AMMUNITION, CLOTHING, AND COMBAT

EQUIPMENT AT WARTIME RATES. THIS HAS CREATED ACUTE STORAGE PROBLEMS AND MUST BE STOPPED.

NOTE BY OC/T: EXDIS CAPTION ADDED PER S/S-O - MR. TWOHIE.

SECRET

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

----- 051453

R 091105Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7226

INFO SECDEF

CIA

CINCPAC

USSAG

*EMBASSY BANGKOK *

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0186

EXDIS

5. PROJECT 404. JCS PROJECT 404, COMPRISED OF ARMY AND AIR FORCE AUGMENTEES TO THE DAO WAS CONFIGURED TO ASSIST THE RLGAFF DURING THE DAYS OF COMBAT IN LAOS. ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT REQUIRED TO REMOVE THEM UNTIL 60 DAYS AFTER THE GOVERNMENT IS FORMED, THE DATT HAS RECOMMENDED TO ME THAT PROJECT 404 SHOULD BE RECONFIGURED FROM ESSENTIALLY WHAT IS A COMBAT OPERATIONS/ INTELLIGENCE AND COMBAT COMMUNICATIONS ORIENTED ORGANIZATION TO ONE THAT WILL ENABLE US TO PROVIDE THE MAXIMUM ASSISTANCE TO THE RLGAFF DURING THE TRANSITION FROM WAR TO PEACE. WE ARE ATTEMPTING TO ESTABLISH A LOGISTICAL INFRASTRUCTURE, OPERATED BY LAO TO REPLACE THE SYSTEM THAT DURING WARTIME WAS OPERATED BY AMERICAN AND THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS. I HAVE DIRECTED THE DATT TO PROVIDE ME A LIST OF THE SKILLS HE BELIEVES ARE REQUIRED. HE HAS ALSO INFORMED ME THAT HE BELIEVES SOME SELECTIVE REDUCTIONS CAN BE MADE IN THE PRESENT TOTAL STRENGTH OF PROJECT 404 DURING THIS TRANSITION. I BELIEVE IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO ABOLISH PROJECT 404 AT THIS TIME, BUT WE SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE TIME LEFT TO US TO DO THE JOB THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE IN LAOS

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BEFORE THE FORMATION OF THE PGNU FORCES A REDUCTION IN
THE DAO TO 301 UNIFORMED PERSONNEL.

6. RECOMMENDATION. IN CONCLUSION, I BELIEVE THAT THE
REQUIREMENTS IMPOSED ON US BY STATE MESSAGE 060000
HAVE LARGELY BEEN OVERCOME BY EVENTS OF THE PAST NINE
MONTHS. MOREOVER, I BELIEVE CONTINUED ADHERENCE TO
ITS INSTRUCTIONS REDUCES OUR FLEXIBILITY TO MEET THE
REQUIREMENTS AS THEY EXIST, AND INHIBITS OUR ABILITIES
TO TAKE MAXIMUM ADVANTAGE OF THE TIME REMAINING TO US
BEFORE THE COALITION GOVERNMENT IS FORMED. I THEREFORE
STRONGLY RECOMMENDED THAT THIS MESSAGE BE RESCINDED.
WHITEHOUSE

NOTE BY OC/T: EXDIS CAPTION ADDED PER S/S-O - MR. TWOHIE.

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